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BY

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(A proposal for research to determine the state
of public knowledge of the principles and practice
of city government in the State of California.)

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A PROPOSAL FOR RESEARCH TO DETERMINE THE STATE OF
PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE
OF CITY GOVERNMENT IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

SUBMITTED BY ROGER A. STOREY
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WESTERN GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL CONTEST

December, 1976

A PROPOSED NEW SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT FOR THE STATE OF
KANSAS KNOWN AS THE KANSAS AND PRINCIPLES
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE OF KANSAS

THE STATE OF KANSAS
BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF KANSAS

WESTERN CONSTITUTIONAL ASSOCIATION
REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1912

I. THE NEED FOR THE RESEARCH

In recent years, many city governments, particularly in California, have made significant progress in implementing modern management techniques, increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of traditional city services, initiating new programs to deal with urban social problems, and even using industrial and space-age technology. In doing so we have left the general public behind.

If the democratic process is going to work in a meaningful way at the local level, then there must be broader understanding among the general public as to how city government is organized, who the key officials are and what are their responsibilities, what basic legal powers does city government have and how are these powers carried out in practice, and what are the issues in the major policy questions that most city governments face at one time or another.

It is safe to say that the comment received at most public hearings is based on ignorance or self-interest. Only very rarely, if at all, does someone make a comment that reflects understanding of the issues and concern for the public interest or community as a whole.

Until recently, city governments could make significant progress as mentioned above because of occasional enlightened council members and public leaders, well-trained, competent professional staffs, ideas furnished by the League of California Cities and professional associations, and the fact that the general public was almost totally apathetic toward city government. Now, however, three issues are turning people out in larger

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the

in California, and some of the most important progress in the

modern management techniques, improving the efficiency and

effectiveness of traditional city services, including the

growing to deal with urban social problems, and even using

industrial and space-age technology. In doing so we have

the general public.

It is the democratic process is going to work in a meaningful

way at the local level, then there will be broader industrial

growth. The general public is in a position to respond to the

and the key officials are and what the local responsibility

what local government does city government does and how

these issues related to the process, and what the local

in the local policy process, and what city government

at the time of writing.

It is not to say that the process is not a

process is based on the process of self-interest. Only very

it is all, that means that the process is not

at the local and national level, the public interest or

a whole.

But if we really, city government could also

progress is not to be made by the process of

current needs and public interest, well-known, constant

political system, that is, the system of California

local and national government, and the fact that the

and public are not really the same thing, and city government

now, however, there is a growing feeling that the

numbers than ever before - rapidly increasing assessed valuation of property resulting in noticeably higher property taxes, land use planning based upon rational principles of environmental accomodation and community design rather than political expediency, and environmental protection measures that call for close scrutiny of development proposals and result in higher utility charges.

The réaction of the general public tends to be irrational and destructive rather than issue-oriented and constructive. They would rather recall the Council or fire the City Manager or Planning Director than discuss what levels of service should be provided in the community and how such services can be paid for most equitably. They feel that they must fight to protect individual constitutional rights rather than focusing on the affects of uncontrolled land use upon the community as a whole and how the community could be planned to ensure physical, economic, and social viability for many years to come. They feel that taxes must be reduced no matter what the consequences because they fail to make the connection between their individual family quality of life and the level of city services provided in the community.

City officials, and education officials at all levels, need to be made aware of the state of public knowledge of the principles and practice of city government in California. Research should focus on the state of public knowledge of:

1. The forms of city government permitted in California and the strengths and weaknesses of each.
2. The responsibilities of key city officials, such as Mayor, Council Members, Planning Commissioners, City

Manager, City Attorney, Planning Director, Public Works Director, Police Chief, etc., and to whom they are accountable.

3. Basic police power of city government and typical means of implementation such as solid waste collection ordinances; animal control ordinances; utility ordinances; zoning and subdivision ordinances, and their relation to property rights; sign control and landscaping ordinances; ordinances regulating use of streets, sidewalks, and other public property; and building/housing codes.

4. The means of financing city government services.

5. Issues involved in basic policy questions dealt with by city governments, such as land use planning and zoning; establishment of site plan, architectural, and landscaping standards; environmental review process; housing; transportation; police community relations; annexation; budget review process, etc.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Much of the managerial and technological progress made by city governments in recent years will be lost if the political backlash resulting from the factors mentioned earlier puts in power individuals who do not understand up-to-date principles and practice of city government, who do not want the advice of professional staff and outside influences, and who prefer to govern by seat-of-the-pants judgment based upon the political pressures of the moment and without particular concern for the technicalities of laws and administrative regulations. This

However, this strategy, if it is to be successful, must be based on a solid understanding of the political and social context in which it is to be implemented.

It is also important to recognize that the political and social context in which a strategy is implemented can significantly influence its effectiveness. For example, a strategy that is successful in one context may be ineffective or even counterproductive in another.

Therefore, it is essential to conduct a thorough analysis of the political and social context in which a strategy is to be implemented. This analysis should take into account the interests and power of the various actors involved, as well as the historical and cultural context of the situation.

(1) The Importance of the Context

There are two main reasons why the context is so important. First, the context determines the interests and power of the various actors involved. For example, in a context where the state is weak, a strategy that relies on state support may be ineffective. Second, the context determines the historical and cultural context of the situation. For example, a strategy that is successful in one context may be ineffective or even counterproductive in another.

would be a throwback to earlier times in the history of city government in this country and would not be in the long-term public interest.

The research can help concerned city officials design effective public information programs and improve their own personal communication with the public; but, more importantly, the research will provide information that cities and the League of California Cities can present to local and State education officials and the State Legislature as evidence that major changes are needed in civics and social studies curricula at all levels of education within the State. (My assumption is that the research will show appalling ignorance and misinformation on the part of a majority of citizens.)

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

1. A door-to-door random survey conducted by trained opinion researchers could be used to obtain information from a random sample of voting age city residents hopefully representing a cross-section of age and income levels. Several cities of various sizes, types, and geographical locations should be selected for this survey.
2. A mail-out questionnaire should be used to determine the state of knowledge of "leaders" of various aspects of State and local life, such as leaders of business and industry, State and local elected officials, heads and top staff of educational institutions, leaders of public interest organizations such as taxpayers associations, environmental and consumer groups, and leaders of professional organizations and service clubs. These are the people that, one way or another, have influence in city

which is a reference to earlier work in the history of the
movement in this country and would not be in the long-run
policy interest.

The Committee can only recommend that officials should
continue to be interested in the movement and to have their own
personal communication with the public but, more importantly,
the movement will require information that is not only the
of California State can present to the public and state education
officials and the state legislature as evidence that major changes
are needed in state and local school systems at all levels
of education within the state. (My recommendation is that the
research staff also spend time on the movement and information on the
part of a number of officials.)

111 RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A short-term random survey conducted by trained personnel
researchers could be used to obtain information from a random
sample of voting age city residents; hopefully representing a
cross-section of age and income levels. Several cities of various
size, type, and geographical location should be selected for
this survey.

2. A self-administered survey should be used to determine the
state of knowledge of "history" of various aspects of state and
local life, such as history of business and industry, state and
local elected officials, state and local staff of educational
institutions, leaders of public interest organizations such as
university associations, environmental and consumer groups, and
leaders of professional organizations and service clubs. These
are the people that, one way or another, have influence in the

affairs and should know more about city government than the general public.

3. A suitable examination should be prepared and administered to a random sample of high school seniors, community college sophomores, and university seniors, to test the effectiveness of educational institutions in conveying knowledge of city government to students.

IV. PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

Short Term -

City officials would be motivated to undertake comprehensive public information programs designed to close specific knowledge gaps identified by the research that may relate to current issues in a particular community. In the conduct of meetings and hearings, city officials would have a better idea of the level of knowledge of people in attendance and may be motivated to do a better job of explaining background and aspects of an issue. These efforts may help defuse some of the anti-government backlash now being experienced in many cities.

Long Term -

Assuming the research would lead to improvement of educational curricula in the State, it could be the case that future generations of citizens of voting age will be better informed as to the principles and practice of city government, will be more inclined to discuss issues rather than resorting too readily to attacking personalities or government structure, and will be more inclined to consider the public or community interest rather than resorting only to defense of self interest.

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